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SHORTER ARTICLES AND CORRESPONDENCE

THE INHERITANCE OF THE MANNER OF CLASPING THE HANDS

If the hands be clasped naturally, most people will put the same thumb—either that of the right or of the left hand—uppermost every time. The position assumed apparently has no relation to right- or left-handedness, although, as will be shown, a small majority put the right thumb uppermost. Some time ago letters were sent out asking for data concerning the manner in which the different members of families clasped their hands. Among the many generous replies was one from Professor J. Arthur Thomson, of Aberdeen, Scotland, giving data for about 600 individuals. It was intended that the hands should be clasped with the fingers of each hand alternating; but this was not made as clear as it should have been, and some of the correspondents clasped their hand with all of the fingers of one hand between the thumb and index finger of the other. This confusion does not exist in Professor Thomson's data. Accordingly only they are discussed in this note. The accompanying table gives a condensed analysis of the data, R and L standing for right thumb uppermost and left thumb uppermost, respectively.

Parents.	No. of Families.	Offspring.					
		Male.		Female.		Total.	
		R.	L.	R.	L.	R.	L.
♂ R. × ♀ R.	75	71	23	95	40	166 (72.5 %)	63
♂ R. × ♀ L.	49	33	22	28	27	61 (55.5 %)	49
♂ L. × ♀ R.	53	46	24	40	40	86 (57.3 %)	64
♂ L. × ♀ L.	36	24	29	22	34	46 (42.2 %)	63

It is evident that the mode of clasping the hands is inherited. It can scarcely be acquired by imitation as it is too slight a thing to be noted unless attention is called to it. The thumb position is usually quite constant in very young children. However, it does not seem to follow the Mendelian law, as neither position breeds true. The data show no significant sexual dimorphism,

61 per cent. of the males having the right uppermost and 58 per cent. of the females; 59 per cent. of the parents and 60 per cent. of the offspring put the right uppermost, so that there does not appear to be any reproductive selection. The coefficient of association between parents of 0.02 demonstrates the lack of assortative mating. This last conclusion is in sharp contrast with the results concerning other characters in man.

There are a number of somewhat similar problems in the lower animals which are of importance in the study of evolution. Thus, the males of the common black cricket (*Gryllus*) usually keep the right tegmen over the left. This results in one set of sound-producing organs being functionless. In the closely related Locustidae there is only one set of sound producing organs and the tegminal position is fixed. It would be interesting to know if mutations to the other position occur. The fish *Anableps anableps* has the anal fin modified into an intromittent organ adapted for sidewise motion. On about three fifths of the males it can move to the right and on about two fifths to the left. (AMER. NAT., xxix, pp. 1012-1014.) A similar state of affairs exists in the females, but with the relative frequencies reversed. Copulation is effected by a right male at the left side of a left female and *vice versa*. Whether the species will eventually split up into two on the basis of this character or not would seem to depend on how the anal-fin-twist is inherited. However, if the tendency to twist to the right or to the left be inherited as a character apart from sex there would seem to be no chance of two varieties or species being formed, as each mating is between opposites. The reversed position of the nerves in the optic chiasma of fishes was found by Larrabee (*Proc. Am. Acad. Arts and Sciences*, xlvi, No. 12) not to be inherited.

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